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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a case study in which two teachers attempted to bring peace education to their classrooms. To date, the most prevalent approaches to peace education center on a curriculum or a program. The two teachers rejected such curricula and programs in favor of an approach that emphasized the importance of the environment in developing and nurturing positive behaviors and preventing negative ones, predicated on the assumption that "children learn what they live." Their approach to peace education was through an environment focused on relationships, i.e., how people interact with one another and with nature. The teachers in this study were overt in their efforts to deal with power relationships within their classrooms. Hierarchical structures were adjusted to give children a real and on-going voice, time structures were altered to provide children with choice, and grouping was heterogeneous to take advantage of the cultural diversity that existed in both classrooms. The teachers exhibited the type of connected teaching described by Gilligan (1992); they consistently examined the capabilities and needs of the children in their charge, and without exerting power over them or dominating them they met learner needs and helped them do what they needed to do. The culture of their classrooms valued cooperation rather than competition, traditionally a value of the dominant culture. The paper discusses the results and possibilities for this model of peace education. (BT)

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Louise Bogart and Helen Slaughter

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Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
(Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).

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PEACE EDUCATION IN TWO ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS WITH DIVERSE STUDENTS

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Introduction

To date, the most prevalent approaches to peace education in schools have been to adopt a curriculum or a program. Such curricula and programs have proliferated as schools try to address the problem of violence on their campuses. The two teachers who participated in this study chose not to adopt the curriculum approach because they held beliefs that emphasized the importance of the environment in developing and nurturing positive behaviors and preventing negative ones. However, their focus was clearly on nurturing positive behaviors. The case study teachers believed that development of peaceful behaviors was predicated on the assumption that "children learn what they live." Therefore, their approach to peace education was through an environment that focused on relationships, i.e., how people interacted with one another and with nature.

Peace Education

Reardon (1988), a prominent peace educator, referred to an unapologetic emphasis on specific values as a defining feature of peace education. This is especially true of positive peace education which requires teachers, students and policy makers to analyze values conflicts at both personal and structural levels. Values of preserving the ecosystem in environmental education, values of increasing material well-being in development education, and values recognizing the dignity and worth of all human beings in human rights education, are at the heart of positive peace education.

According to Reardon (1988), deeply embedded in positive peace education is an assumption that the achievement of positive peace requires consistency of values. That is, values need to be a consistent part of education across the years rather than haphazardly or sporadically referenced. Both teachers in this study engaged in laying such a foundation of values for life as they held children responsible for their own behavior and structured an environment so that children had a great deal of practice in making choices. Assisting children in evaluating those choices when they did not work was part of the process of helping children learn to take responsibility for their decisions as well as for their behaviors and their consequences.

Dunin-Wasowicz (1993) and Sund (1993), two early childhood researchers, indicated some outcomes of peace education are: 1) love and respect for others; 2) social awareness; 3) ecological awareness; 4) fair and moral beings; and 5) conflict resolution skills. Only the last refers to negative peace.

Education for Positive Peace in this Study

The teachers in this study were overt in their efforts to deal with power relationships within their classrooms. Hierarchical structures were adjusted to give children a real and on-going voice, time structures were altered to provide children with choice, and grouping was heterogeneous to take advantage of the cultural diversity that existed in both classrooms.

The teachers in this study exhibited the type of connected teaching described by Gilligan (1992) in that they consistently examined the capabilities and needs of the children in their charge and without exerting power over them or dominating them, they met learner needs and helped them do what they needed to do. For example, the case studies showed teachers respecting students own rhythms rather than imposing arbitrary timetables. While it was not always possible to honor student's rhythms in the public school setting, the teacher did implement such a philosophy as much as possible when she controlled the time. Noddings (1984) contrasted this caring approach to teaching in which the teacher "receives and accepts the student's feelings toward the subject matter; she looks at it and listens to it through his eyes and ears" (p. 177) with her view of the present paradigm in which children are expected to see content material from the teacher's perspective. Noddings (1984) indicated that an educational institution that places care and understanding of persons at the core rather than standards might take human development in a different direction. Both teachers appeared to agree with her.

Belenky et al (1986) introduced the concept of a midwife teacher that is the direct opposite of what Paulo Freire identified as a banker teacher. "Banking education anesthetizes, says Freire, "it attempts to maintain the submersion of consciousness." (1971, p. 68). "Midwife teachers do not administer anesthesia. They support students' thinking, but they do not do the students' thinking for them or expect students to think as they do (Belenky et al, 1986, pp. 217-218). Midwife teachers encourage learners to speak in their own voices supporting the evolution of thinking, and by focusing on students knowledge. Freire's (1971) problem solving method serves as another model for evoking critical reflection from both student and teacher. Most of the time, both engaged students in dialogue, encouraging them to develop their own ways of expressing their thoughts, whether for social or academic problem solving activities.

A Peace Education Model from the Study

Therefore, in their own ways and to the extent that their schools structures allowed, these teachers shared power with the students rather than socializing them into an authoritarian and unequal social order that reinforced the status quo and values of the dominant culture. The culture of their classrooms reflected a dominant value on cooperation rather than on competition which has been a value of the dominant culture.

While there seems to be no one clear definition of peace education, a model of peace education can be described as manifested in the classrooms of the two particular peace educators that participated in this study. They were clear about the fact that they were teaching values, clear about what those values were, and they made no apologies for either the values emphasized or the necessity to include them in the educational experience of the children in their charge. Both teachers valued children having a voice in and choice about the quality and content of their classroom experience and believed strongly that such participation carried with it distinct responsibilities. Children committed to abide by the rules that the group adopted and they were held to that commitment.

Another value that emerged was that children learned to express their feelings in words in order to get their needs met and to do so in a timely fashion. Children were also coached on how to respond appropriately within the context of the classroom's explicit values which made it safe to express and respond to feelings. The teachers found that directly teaching these skills was a necessary component of developing a peaceful classroom because the children were not encultured to live this way. Teaching conflict resolution skills was a concession they made to negative peace practice so that their students could experience success. It seemed that many conflicts were prevented from becoming serious because children took responsibility for using their own words and for responding appropriately to each other's words resulting in little need for formal conflict resolution processes.

The values of cooperation and caring were evident in almost everything that occurred within these classrooms which spoke to the kind of character development to which these two teachers were committed. In addition, both teachers provided a model for students by incorporating the values of respect for self, for others, and for the environment, with attention to all inherent implications, into everything a they said and did. Consistent with the beliefs of these two participants in the power of the environment, peace education manifested in how instruction was organized, how a lesson was planned, how the class was managed, how explanations were given, how interest and motivation were aroused, the types of questions and how they were asked, how teachers reacted to student's responses, how helpful correction and feedback were given, and how unfair biases were avoided in interacting with students.

With all this in mind, the main purpose in educating young children, for both participants, was to address the issues of peace education through an environment in which the values of caring, cooperation, and community were lived experiences. It was through their focus on these values that they felt they made their greatest contribution to the lives of children and to the communities in which these children now live and those in which they would live as adults. The two teachers from the case studies chose to work with young children precisely because they wanted to positively influence the future of the planet and because they believed the best way to do that was by changing the nature of schooling as experienced by young children.

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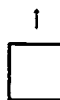
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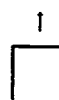
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